

School Climate Reform: Tools for improving the heart of the school



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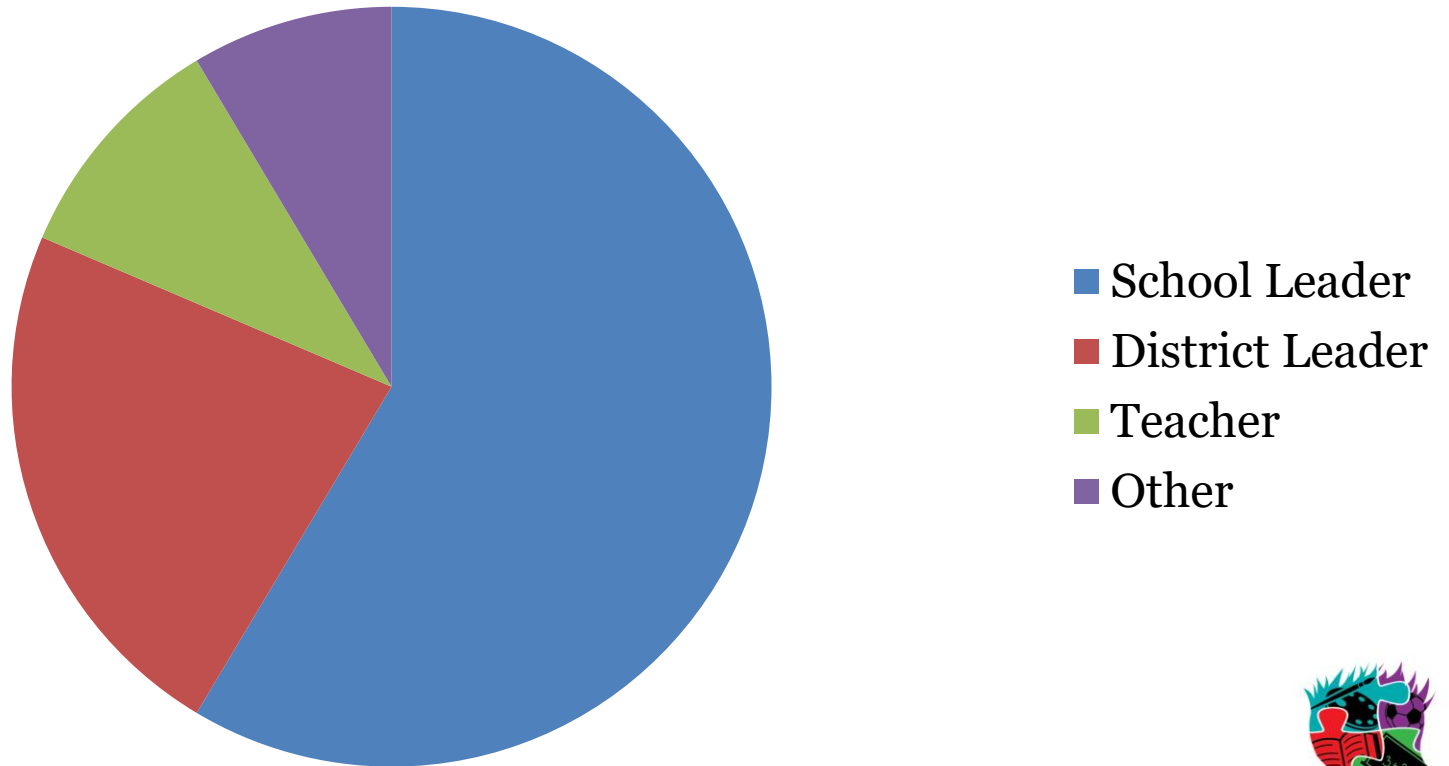
- Joseph Hattrick, MSW
 - Principal & Superintendent
 - Doctoral Candidate
 - Not the expert but passionate

Collaborator:



- Jonathan Cohen, PhD
 - National School Climate Center, Past-President

Who's who???



Goals

1. Learn about what school climate is and why it's important.
2. Explore the tools that education leaders can use to assess school climate in their school or district.
3. Explore the characteristics of effective school climate improvement processes.
4. Learn specific steps which may increase school climate at your school beginning Monday.
5. Discuss next steps for school leaders to improve school climate.

Goals (continued)

- What goals do you have in attending this presentation?

School Climate: Definitions and Importance



How do you define school climate?

What does school climate feel like in your school?

- School climate refers to the quality and character of school life.
- Based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures

Simple definition:

The Character and Quality of School Life



Culture vs. Climate

School climate = subjective experience of school (the feel)

School culture = actual state of the school

Example: If the school building itself was in disrepair, it would be considered school culture

How people feel about it and how they see it (ie. “The school is a wreck and it makes me feel like nobody cares about the students here”) would be climate.

<https://youtu.be/hXdmaBlijDo>

Positive School Climate Defined:

While there are many definitions of positive school climate, the National School Climate Center's definition seems to capture the collective definition.



- Fosters youth development
- Norms and values support feelings of safety
- Respect and engagement
- Shared school vision
- Educators model a love for learning
- All community members contribute to care of physical environment

What the Research Says

Research states that the benefits of school climate include:

Benefits of School Climate	
Higher Academic Achievement	Healthy Relationships
Increased Social Responsibility	Increased Teacher Retention



What School Leaders Say

(According to a study done by Cohen with 600+ school leaders)

- **School climate matters!**

- 100% of building & district leaders believe that school climate is “important” or “very important” (89% believe it is “very important”)

- **Barriers to a positive school climate?**

- Many! Lack of understanding (31%); Budget (20%); competing priorities (23%); Lack of time (17%); Other (9%)

- **Desire resources to support policy, measurement decisions, improvement guidelines**

- The majority of respondents agreed

Assessing School Climate

School Climate Measurement Tools

Measurable Components of School Climate

Safety

- Rules and Norms
- physical safety
- social/emotional safety

Teaching & Learning

- Support for Learning
- Prosocial Education

Interpersonal Relationships

- Respect for Diversity
- Social support/adults
- Social Support/Students

Institutional Environment

- School Connectedness

Staff Only

- Leadership
- Professional Relationships

School Climate Measurement Tools

What is measured is what counts

Readiness Assessments

Leadership

Comprehensive survey

All stakeholders

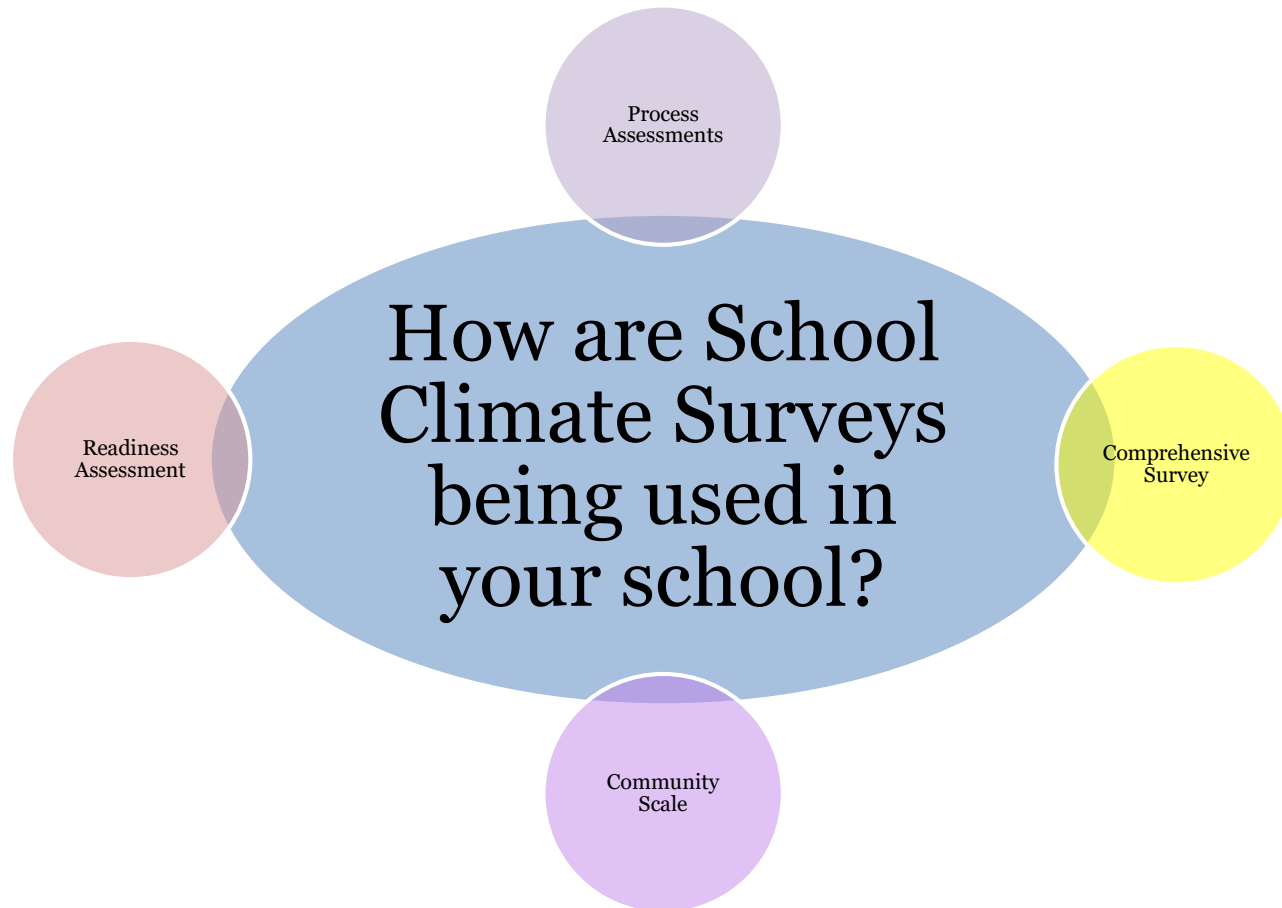
Community Scale

Community & Leaders

Process Assessments

End of stage/reassess

School Climate Surveys



Improving School Climate

School Climate Improvement Process

“An intentional, strategic, collaborative, transparent, data-driven and democratically informed process designed to ignite the intrinsic motivation of students, parents/guardians and school personnel to create even safer, more supportive, engaging and healthy schools.”
(National School Climate Council, 2012)

School Climate Improvement Process



School Climate Improvement Process

- The “*Perfect World*” **Vs.**
 - **Stage One: Preparation**
 - **Stage Two: Evaluation**
 - **Stage Three: Action-Planning**
 - **Stage Four: Implementation**
 - **Stage Five: Re-evaluation**
- The “*Real World*” ...the process is **not** linear!!!!
 - School Board Buy-In
 - Faculty/Staff Training
 - Student Involvement
 - Policy Writing
 - Standards Adoption
 - Family Education
 - Climate Assessment
 - Perceptions of Readiness

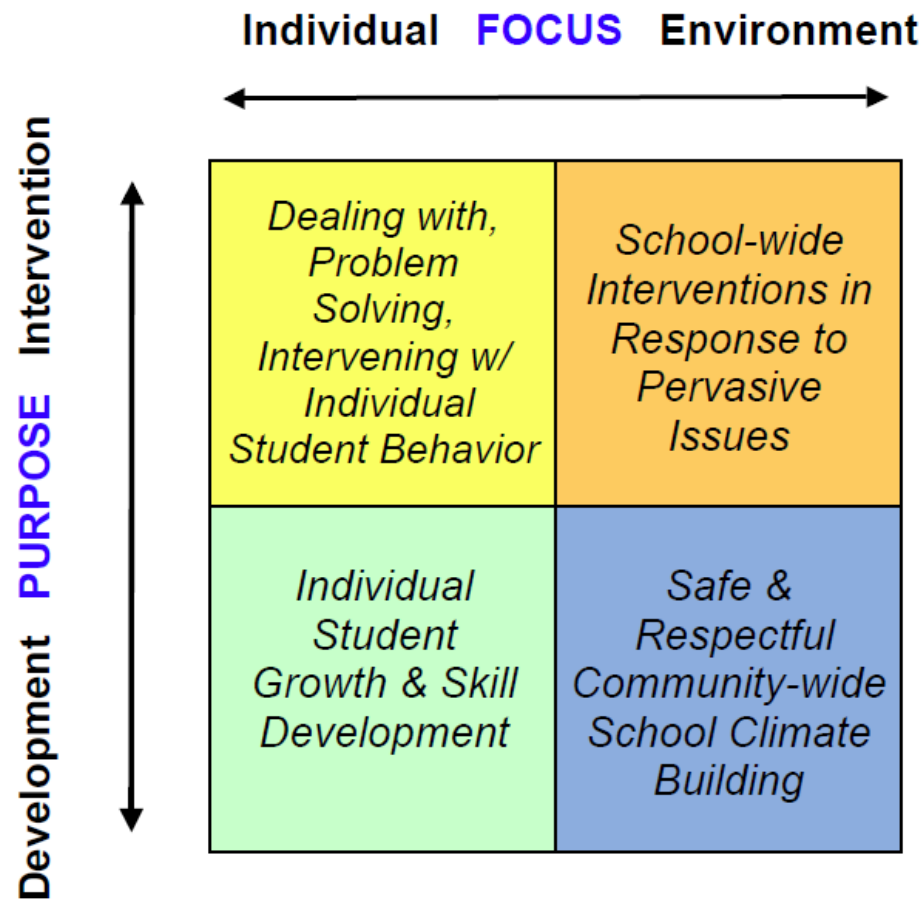
School Climate Development Model

How is Time Spent at Your School?

From the set of cards provided, select the one that represents the area you spend the majority of your time on.

Discuss at your tables HONESTLY where you (or your school) spends the most time and why.

School Climate Development Model



Another way of Looking at it...

<u>Individual Intervention</u>	<u>School-Wide Community Intervention</u>
<u>Individual Development</u>	<u>School-Wide Community Development</u>

Putting it Together

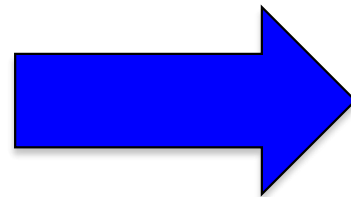
<u>Individual Intervention</u> (Reaction to <u>individual</u> inappropriate behavior)	<u>School-Wide Community Intervention</u> (Reaction to <u>pervasive</u> inappropriate behavior)
<u>Individual Development</u> (Character Education/ Development)	<u>School-Wide Community Development</u> (School Climate Improvement/ Moral Community)



Pivotal/*Paradigm* Shift in Thinking & Engaging

Fixing
Problems
& Putting Out
Fires

(reactive)



Individual Skill
Building
&
Creating the
Climate

(pro-active)

Programs & Practices

Each card provided lists a program or practice that schools may engage in.

Place each card in the area that best represents its focus and purpose.

What are some others?

Peer Mediation	Tier II & III Interventions	Suspensions
Keeping in from Recess	Character Education	Developmental Guidance
Life Skills Program	Adventure Education	Restorative Discipline Practices
Parenting Class for Student Parents	Student Assistance Teams	Alternative to Suspension Program
Peer Leadership	Social Contract	Family Involvement
	Faculty/Staff Role Modeling	

**DON'T MOVE YOUR
CARDS!!!!!!**

<p><u>Individual Intervention</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Peer Mediation •Tier II & III Interventions •Suspension •Keeping in from Recess 	<p><u>School-Wide Community Intervention</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Restorative Discipline Practices •Parenting Class for Student Parents •Student Assistance Team •Alternative to Suspension Program
<p><u>Individual Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Character Education •Developmental Guidance •Life Skills Program •Adventure Education 	<p><u>School-Wide Community Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Peer Leadership •Social Contract •Family Involvement •Faculty/Staff Role Modeling

School Improvement “On the Ground”

A school improvement effort that mobilizes the school community – under the leadership of the principal – to address three essential questions:

1. What kind of school do we want ours to be?
2. What are our current strengths, needs and weaknesses?
3. Given a gap analysis – vision and current reality – what schoolwide and/or instructional and/or relational goals do we want to work on together?

Practical Steps to Impact School Climate NOW

• The Riverbend Story

expert spotlight
No Magic Remedy for School Climate Improvement
 By Joseph Hattrick, MSW, Principal, Riverbend Preparatory, Monticello Education, Inc.

If the Plan Doesn't Work, Change the Plan. But Never the Goal

It is common knowledge a positive school climate has a strong association with student achievement. While schools across the United States search for the curriculum to close achievement gaps or highly qualified staff to breathe life into lessons, the climate of the school is often overlooked. Through my own school climate critical to student success, how to create a positive school climate is quite challenging.

In 2012, I was asked to assume the leadership role at a K-6 charter school. Student enrollment was declining and student over was increasing. Trust from the local community was declining. There was a perception of bullying behavior and staff interviews. Transparency was lacking from school records and staff interviews. Transparency was lacking from school records and staff interviews. Transparency was lacking from school records and staff interviews.

Based on these observations, the school established the following goals: 1) increase community credibility through community awareness and parent satisfaction, 2) improve student safety through positive behavior and higher expectations, and 3) demonstrate strong leadership and stability.

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The tools I used throughout this process CAN be used at every school, small or large, private or public. These tools are:

- **Be intentional.** It is typically not the case that accidents will provide positive results. Plans are a common practice in school leadership and they should be developed and implemented thoughtfully.
- **Walk the talk.** It is not enough to tell the team to get out in the community and get involved or to sit down and get to know your students and parents. The leader of the school must be willing to do the same.
- **Communicate and listen.** The most effective tool for analysis is to listen and clarify. This can be through conversation or direct/indirect observations or surveys.
- **Be present and positive.** If you are the school leader, this is your home away from home. Make sure people see you, can talk to you, and feel welcome in your home.

Change is a Process not an Event!



What worked for me

- Understanding our starting point
 - Surveys, interviews, reviews, and observations
- Set Goals
 - Increase community credibility through community awareness and parent satisfaction
 - Improve student safety through positive behavior and high expectations
 - Demonstrate strong leadership and stability
- Live the vision EVERY DAY!

Tools for Success

- 1) Be intentional
 - Accidents rarely produce positive results
- 2) Walk the Talk
 - It's not enough to talk about getting involved in the community or getting to know parents; the leader must demonstrate the importance.
- 3) Communicate and listen
 - And clarify
- 4) Be present, visible and positive
 - You've got to "show up".
 - This is your home away from home. Make people feel welcome!
 - Thanksgiving
- 5) The three R's
 - ✓ The extended family project

Next Steps for School Leaders

Advice for School Leaders

- Set desired goals and conduct gap analyses.
- Use data as a ‘flashlight’ rather than a ‘hammer.’
- Create a network of schools and communities committed to evaluating and improving school climate to develop “centers of excellence” others can learn from.
- Consider joining learning forums where they can be teachers and learners together regarding common barriers and solutions to school climate improvement efforts.
- Consider potential research opportunities to measure school climate and readiness.
 - A school climate readiness study
 - Support the develop of a series of very short social/emotional/civic learning measures that support middle (and high) school students as well as their teachers considering their prosocial learning strengths and needs

In Summary

- School climate matters!
- There are four major tools to assess school climate: Readiness Assessments, Comprehensive Surveys, Community Scales, Process Assessments.
- School climate improvement efforts must start with goal setting, involve the entire school community, and be aligned with implementation science.
- Conditions in which positive school climate can grow can be created by doing a few small things.

1) What are your key takeaways from today's presentation?

As a result of today's session, what action steps do you plan to take beginning on Day ONE?

Key Takeaways

Thank you!

Questions?

Joseph Hattrick, MSW
Joseph.Hattrick@gmail.com